Flavius Aetius

(c. 390 – 21 September 454)

BRIEFING

Flavius Aetius[a] (also spelled **Aëtius**;[b] Latin: [aːˈɛtiʊs]; c. 390 – 21 September 454) was a Roman general and statesman of the closing period of the Western Roman Empire. He was a military commander and the most influential man in the Empire for two decades (433–454). He managed policy in regard to the attacks of barbarian federates settled throughout the West. Notably, he mustered a large Roman and allied (*foederati*) army in the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains, ending an invasion of Gaul by Attila in 451, though the Hun and his subjugated allies still managed to invade Italy the following year, an incursion best remembered for the Sack of Aquileia and the intercession of Pope Leo I. In 454, he was assassinated by the emperor Valentinian III.

Aetius has often been called the "Last of the Romans". Edward Gibbon refers to him as "the man universally celebrated as the terror of Barbarians and the support of the Republic" for his victory at the Catalaunian Plains. J.B. Bury notes, "That he was the one prop and stay of the Western Empire during his life time was the unanimous verdict of his contemporaries."

BIOGRAPHY

Origins and family

Aetius was born at Durostorum in Moesia Secunda (modern Silistra, Bulgaria), roughly around 390, as he was described as a "young adolescent" in 405. His father, Gaudentius, was a Roman general and described as a native of the province of Scythia. Aetius' mother, whose name is unknown, was a wealthy aristocratic woman of ancestry from Rome or some other city in the Italian peninsula. Before 425 Aetius married the daughter of Carpilio, who gave him a son, also named Carpilio. Later he married Pelagia, widow of Bonifacius, from whom he had a son, Gaudentius. It is possible that he also had a daughter, whose husband, Thraustila, avenged Aetius' death by killing emperor Valentinian III.

Early years and service under Joannes

As a boy, Aetius was at the service of the imperial court, enrolled in the military unit of the *Protectores Domestici* and then elevated to the position of *tribunus praetorianus partis militaris*, setting him up for future political eligibility. Between 405 and 408 he was kept as hostage at the court of Alaric I, king of the Visigoths. In 408 Alaric asked to keep Aetius as a hostage, but was refused, as Aetius was sent to the court of Uldin, king of the Huns, where he would stay throughout much of the reign of Charaton, Uldin's successor. Some modern historians have suggested that Aetius's upbringing amongst militaristic peoples gave him a martial vigour not common in contemporary Roman generals.

In 423 the Western Emperor Honorius died. The most influential man in the West, Castinus, chose as his successor Joannes, a high-ranking officer. Joannes was not a member of the Theodosian dynasty so he was not recognized by the eastern court. The Eastern Emperor Theodosius II organised a military expedition westward, led by Ardaburius and his son Aspar, to put his cousin, the young Valentinian III (who was a nephew of Honorius), on the western throne. Aetius entered the service of the usurper as *cura palatii* and was sent by Joannes to ask the Huns for assistance. Joannes lacked a strong army and fortified himself in his capital, Ravenna, where he was killed in the summer of 425. Shortly afterwards, Aetius returned to Italy with a large force of Huns to find that power in the west was now in the hands of Valentinian III and his mother Galla Placidia. After fighting against Aspar's army, Aetius managed to compromise with Galla Placidia. He sent back his army of Huns and in return obtained the rank of *comes et magister militum per Gallias*, the commander in chief of the Roman army in Gaul.

GOTHIC REVOLT OF THEODORIC I

The Gothic revolt of Theodoric I was an uprising of the Gothic Foederati in Aquitaine (Western Roman Empire) during the regime of Emperor Valentinian III (425-455). That rebellion was led by Theodoric I, King of the Visigoths and took place in the South of France. The uprising took place between 425 and 426, in the period shortly after the death of usurpator John and was terminated by a military operation under the command of Aëtius.

In 426, Aetius arrived in southern Gaul and took command of the field army. At that time Arelate, an important city in Narbonensis near the mouth of the Rhone, was under siege from the Visigoths, led by their king Theodoric I. Aetius defeated Theodoric, lifted the siege of Arelate, and drove the Visigoths back to their holdings in Aquitania.

The cause of the uprising must be sought on the one hand in the settlement of the Goths in Gallia Aquitania close to the Gallic capital Arles by Constantius III and was intended to keep an eye on the senatorial nobility. On the other hand, the political situation of the empire underpined the insurrection.

After the Goths campaigned in Spain for the Romans in the period 416-418 (Gothic war in Spain), they were assigned a settlement area by Emperor Honorius in 418 in the province of Gallia Aquitania with Toulouse as their capital. Main reason for the settlement was that Constantius III, the architect of the settlement treaty, considered the Gallic senatorial class a greater danger to imperial power in Ravenna than the Gothic presence. In the previous period he should have campaigned against a series of usurpers (including Constantine and Jovinus) who received much support from the Gallic elite. With the settlement of the Goths as potential forces close to the center of Gaul, he hoped to better control the senators. Nevertheless, with the establishment of the Goths, Constantius had created a new power group that sought more influence within late Roman Gaul. They Goths were part of the Roman state system, acted within that state system and tried to exert pressure and control as much as possible from within.

With the death of Constantius III in 421 and of Honorius in 423, the Western Roman Empire ended up in a new crisis that would have major consequences for the relationship between imperial power and the army. Because the emperor was still a child, the western part of the empire was governed by mother Galla Placidia who was strongly under the influence of her generals. The Eastern Emperor Theodosius II (her cousin) also exerted great influence on her policies. There were several candidates who went to the position of commander-in-chief, which initiated a development that is described as the 'semi-privatization' of the Roman army. That situation made it possible for Theodoric I, the leader of the Gothic foederati, to realize his plans for more power. He emerged as an ambitious prince who acted in the same line as his infamous predecessors. The first signs of this ambition could already be seen during the Spanish campaign of 422 in which the Goths participated.

History is extremely sparsely narrated about the course of Gothic-Roman relations in the period between 418 and 439. There are a number of events in which the Goths were involved, but cause and effect are missing. The little that has been written down is by Prosper and Hydatius. From 422, the Goths turn out to be disappointing allies, but their presence proved sufficient to keep the Gallic nobility calm. The Goths, on the other hand, needed a series of imperial expeditions to be restrained. In 425 they marched to Arles, but were stopped by Aetius.

The first years of Theoderics' semi-autonomous reign went smoothly. In 418 he succeeded his father as king of the Visigoths in Aquitaine, who had died shortly before. After years of leading a wandering existence, the Goths were finally able to settle down. Under Roman rule they enjoyed many advantages, in return the Goths had to provide military assistance. These peaceful years came to an end with the death of the Western Roman fellow emperors Constantius III in 421.

The policies of the Western Roman Emperor Honorius had always relied heavily on the work of his brother-in-law Constantius, who had been appointed co-emperor seven months earlier. The disappearance of this mainstay mainly caused unrest within the army, with which Theoderic could take advantage. Two important generals Castinus and Bonefatius went to the army's supreme command, thus providing difficulties. Gothic Foederati accompanied them in 422 during a campaign against the Vandals in Baetica in southern Spain. According to chronicler Hydatius, the Goths worked militarily against the Romans and is said they caused the defeat for the Romans. Some historians assume that Theoderic withheld Castinus from the support of the Visigothic auxiliary troops, as a result of which he suffered a heavy defeat in the battle of Tarraco in Baetica against Gunderic, the king of the Vandals who thus became the undisputed masters of Hispania. Probably Theodoric worked together with Boniface.

With the death of Emperor Honorius in 423, a power struggle broke out in the Western Roman Empire that weakened the empire internally. The bulk of the army was in Italy and in Gaul the provincial prefect in Arles was killed during a revolt of his soldiers. In Italy, after Honortius' death, a new emperor emerged, John who had the support of the generals Castinus and Aetius. Now that most of the Roman army was staying elsewhere, Theodoric pushed aside Constantius' peace agreement and rebelled. Without encountering significant opposition, he took possession of all of Aquitaine and provided himself with access to the Mediterranean Sea. He then went up to the Arles to put pressure on the Romans. Some historians see this attempt as a declaration of loyalty to the Theodian dynasty in the hope that it would obtain a more favorable treaty.

In the summer of 425, John was overthrown by an Eastern Roman army, after which Valentinian III was installed as the new emperor. Three days after John was beheaded, Aetius arrived in Italy with a large army of Huns. Unaware of his execution, and after a brief skirmish with Aspar's army, Aëtius made peace. He accepted Valentinian III as emperor and was given the high position of praefectus praetorio per Gallia, entrusting him with the rule of Gaul and Spain. Aetius' appointment as chief executive in Gaul is seen as a maneuver by the new regime to keep a potential troublemakers away from the central government. The newly appointed prefect left Italy with the army he already had and reinforced with large numbers of Huns as mercenaries. Accompanied with this huge army made Aetius an end to the revolt of the Gothic foederati.

Aëtius arrived in the spring of 426 at Arles that was besieged by Theodoric. It seems that the Goths fled when they became aware of Aetius's army. No mention of a battle is made in the surviving sources. Nevertheless, some historians assume that near the city has been fought and the Goths were undermining here. The result of Aetius's arrival is undisputed, the Goths were forced to retreat to Aquitaine.

With the defeat against Aetius, the uprising came to an end. This was followed by peace talks in which the previously concluded treaty with the Romans was renewed, exchanging hostages back and forth. The later emperor Avitus was one of those hostages who stayed at the court of Theodoric. Here he met his sons and taught them.

With Aetius as Gallic prefect and from 429 as magister militum per Gallias, peace seems to have returned to southern France. The period after this until 435 passed without great incidents between the Visigoths and Romans. Nevertheless, Theodoric had not given up his quest for more power, because in 430 a Gothic army still marched to Arles to enforce more favorable conditions. This Gothic army was also defeated by Aetius, again not far from Arles. As far as is known, the Visigoths did not performed military duties in the Spanish provinces during this period.

Nevertheless, in 436 a large-scale conflict (the Gothic War of 436–439) arose between the Goths and Romans that was recorded as a bloody war. Because explanations for these hostilities are lacking, historians place these events in the great context of history.

FRANKISH WAR OF 428

The Frankish War was a short military conflict between the Frankish people and the West Roman Empire under Emperor Valentinian III. In this conflict, it can only be said with certainty that the Roman general Aetius was involved in it. The presence of King Chlodio of the Salians as captain of the Franks is an assumption and is not confirmed by contemporary sources. The war ended in a Roman victory.

In 428, he fought the Salian Franks, defeating their king Chlodio and recovering some territory they had occupied along the Rhine. In 429 he was elevated to the rank of *magister militum*; this was probably the *junior* of the two offices of *comes et magister utriusque militiae*, as the *senior* is known to have been the patrician Flavius Constantinus Felix, the most influential man in those years, and a supporter of Galla Placidia.

Around 400, the Frankish people consisted of two subgroups, the Salian Franks and the Ripuarian Franks, of which the Salians resided within the Roman Empire as foederati and the Ripuarians lived near Cologne on the eastern bank of the Rhine In the province Germania Secunda they delivered troops to the Limitanei in charge of guarding the Rhine border. During the crisis in which the Western Empire ended up as a result of the Rhine crossing and the civil war that broke out, both tribes supported the British usurpator Constantine III and after its decline the Gallic usurper Jovinus. The commander-in-Chief of the Western army Constantius III made an end to the civil war and restored central authority in Gaul. He concluded new treaties with the peoples on the Rhine border and thereby restored the bond with Emperor Honorius.

According to Sulpicius Alexander, the Franks were led by *regales*, little kings. No names of them are handed down from contemporary sources. Chlodio, is the first king that was written about. Taking advantage of the weakening of Roman power caused by the Roman Civil between 427 and 429, the Franks invaded Belgica Secunda in northern Gaul and occupied the territory to the Somme. The armed forces conquered the Northern-Gall cities Tournai, Cambrai and Arras. His raid was successful because the Roman militias deployed against him were defeated or expelled. A real reaction from the Romans was not at first because the commander-in-chief of the Gallic field army had traveled to Ravenna, which is the most plausible reason why the Roman counterattack took some time.

Finally a Roman army was brought against him under the command of Aetius, the Gallic commander-in-chief , *comes et magister militum per Gallias*. He was a former general of the deposed emperor Joannes and previously successfully put an end to the rebellion of Theodoric I in 426. When a crisis broke out as a result of the revolt *comes Africanae* Bonifatius in North-Africa, he stayed in Italy.

In addition to the *Comitatenses*, the Gallic field army, Aetius had access to a large section Hun soldiers, who were famous for their skill as ridden archers. It was a logical decision to quickly send the ride army of Aetius to Gaul to stop the advance of the Franks in the far north. Aetius himself led the army and defeated the Franks in 428. He then restored Roman power over part of the territory they had taken possession of.

The story of this war is extremely succinct. Only in three contemporary sources the conflict is mentioned: Philostorgius, Prosper and the Chronica Gallica of 452. Cassiodorus who reports about war that Aëtius carried out a massacre among the Franks is a later source. Except that Aëtius achieved victory and made peace, the further course of this war is unknown. No place had been reported handed where battles against the Franks took place or it must have been Vicus Helenae. Notwithstanding that, there is more evidence that the fight at Vicus Helenae took place later. Prospers' story of the war is extremely summary and does not tell us which tribe was involved.

GOTHIC REVOLT OF ANAOLSUS

The Gothic Revolt of Anaolsus was an internal conflict in the Western Roman Empire in 430. The conflict took place in southern Gaul where Gothic auxiliary forces of the *comitatenses* under the leadership of Anaolsus had revolted and threatened to take possession of the city of Arles an important administrative center. In response, the Romans sent the army of Aetius to put down the revolt. Begin 430 the Goths led by Anaolsus attacked Arelate again but were defeated by Aetius.

The uprising is only mentioned in the *Chronicon* of Hydatius, a 5th-century bishop and chronicler from Gallaecia (present-day northwestern Spain) and indirectly by Merobaudes. Hydatius describes that a Gothic leader, named Anaolsus, was defeated by Aëtius near Arles in 430, more data is missing. Merobaudes focuses his panegyrical on Aetius and describes how he defended the city against a Germanic attack. In addition to Hydatius and Merobaudes, the Gallic Chronicle of 452 and the writings of Prosper provide additional information about the period, but do not provide a detailed description of the fights.

Several historians have shed their light on this history and tried to turn the single event and the loose chunks of information into a coherent whole. Peter Heather analyzes the attack of the Goths on Arles in 430 in two publications. He emphasizes that this took place during a period of political instability within the Western Roman Empire. Their uprising took place in the context of the waning power of the Western Roman Empire and the internal conflicts within the Roman army and the Senate. Boniface' campaign against the Vandals ran like a common thread through this. On the background played the rivalry between Aetius and Flavius Felix, erupted because Aëtius had to give up part of his force before the war against the Vandals.

Historians such as Peter Heather point to the independence of certain Gothic comitatus (military units) during this period. Between 418 and 439, these units sometimes undertook independent military actions, negotiating directly with Roman authorities, separate from central royal authority.

The Gothic *Rex* Theodoric is not mentioned in the surviving sources. His role during the events is unknown, but he had every interest in increasing the Gothic influence in Gaul as earlier became apparent during his revolt in 425-426. The attack on Arles fits into this view, the possession of this important city was a strategic move to control South Gaul, which made it a repeated target for Gothic attacks.

In 429, the crossing of the Vandals, established in the Diocese of Hispania, to North Africa had resulted in a new dangerous war front. The danger of losing its richest provinces caused the Romans to prepare for urgently sending troops from Italy. This would have reduced also the number of troops in Gaul. The outbreak of uprisings in Gaul and Raetia by groups of Bagaudae, aggravated by an invasion of the Juthungi north of the Alps caused a new threat. The under-manned Roman army in Gaul was not authorized to take adequate action against this.

The circumstances must have been an ideal breeding ground for Anoalsus to start a revolt as leader of the Gothic auxiliary. As on other occasions in the history of the empire, the military crisis situation encouraged to take up arms and, as is often the case, enforcing better conditions for providing military services to the Roman army was the possible cause. It is unknown how large Anoalsus's army was, but it must have been large enough for Aëtius to go to war against him on his own. Some of several thousand therefore seem to be in place here.

The Gothic rebels moved up to conquer Arles. The capital of the Praetorian prefecture of Gaul was a political and military goal. Possession of it was essential for those who wanted to control Gaul. If one keeps the order of Hydatius's events, Aëtius campaigned against the Goths of Anaolsus in early spring, before focusing on the Juthungi and Nori. Near the city, he clashed with the rebels and managed to defeat them convincingly by capturing Anoalsus.

The victory over Anaolsus meant a huge boost for Aëtius. He had managed to eliminate a rival with an army in a strategic area and this contributed to his emergence as the dominant military figure in the West. After this, he focused on the Juthungi and Nori, and led a campaign in the Alps. During this campaign he turned against Felix and had him killed.

AETIUS CAMPAIGN IN THE ALPS

Aetius' campaign in the Alps was a military campaign of the Roman army in the northern Alpine region, where the dioceses Raetia and Noricum were situated. The campaign was directed against the Juthungi and the rebellious population of Noricum (the Nori). The command of the campaign was in the hands of magister militium Aëtius and it began in the spring of 430 CE. In May, the campaign was interrupted to continued the following year.

In May 430, Aetius and the Army accused Felix of plotting against him and some sources believe Aetius had him, his wife, and a deacon killed. Once Felix was dead, Aetius was the highest ranking amongst the *magistri militiae*, even if he had not yet been granted the title of *patricius* or the senior command. During 430 and 431 Aetius was in Raetia and Noricum, re-establishing Roman rule on the Danubian Limes, campaigning against the Juthungi and defeating the Bagaudae in Augusta Vindelicorum. In 431 he returned to Gaul, where he received Hydatius, bishop of Aquae Flaviae, who complained about the attacks of the Suebes. Aetius then defeated the Franks, recapturing Tournacum and Cambriacum. He then sent Hydatius back to the Suebes in Hispania.

The Roman Empire had ended up in a difficult situation by the end of the fourth century when the East Roman army suffered a heavy defeat at Adrianople against the Goths in 378. After that, a series of civil wars broke out that aggravated the situation. In 395 the empire was divided in two and Raetia and Noricum belonged to the western empire.

At the end of the fourth century, living conditions for the civilian population north of the Alps were still bearable. Stilicho's campaign against Alarik in the Gothic War in 403 and the passage of Radagaisus army in 405 had been spared them. Nevertheless, the population increasingly experienced the adverse consequences of the exhausting wars that the army waged to maintain the Roman Empire. To keep the army up to date, units were constantly withdrawn from the border and supplemented with barbaric foederati. In addition, the military was a huge cost item for the empire.

As a result of the internal conflicts and defensive battles against barbarians, the population experienced an increasing tax burden. Historians see these deteriorating economic conditions as the main cause of the dissatisfaction that led to the Nori uprising in the years around 430/431. Heather suggests that the uprising was the same as that of the Bagaudae in Brittany and Spain. According to him, it had been nothing more than a decision by the population to organize themselves after the empire had left them to their own devices for more than two decades.

Hydatius calls the invasion of the Juthungen and the revolt of the Nori in a sentence, which may indicate that the raid and revolt took place simultaneously. The Juthungen were a Germanic tribe living north of the Danube that had made themselves heard before in history. The last time had been during a raid in 383 under the rule of Emperor Valentinian II.

In late 429 or early 430, the Juthungi crossed the Danube and invaded the province of Reaetia Segunda. As on other occasions in the history of the Roman Empire, the reduction of troops at the border and the invasion of the Vandals in Africa was the most plausible reason for the Juthungi to invade the empire. Aetius, appointed *magister equitum praesentalis* since 429 and thus in rank equal to Felix, ended his campaign against the Goths at Arles and put his army into position. The army he led consisted of his own Hunse *bucellari* and parts of the imperial army the *praesentalis* from Italy. The later emperor Avitus, and the poet Merobaudes were also part of this army.

As soon as the Alpine passes were passable, the army headed for Raetia in the north and fought the attackers. In all likelihood, fights took place naar the city of Augusta Vindelicorum (present-day Augsburg). An inscription has been found in this city that is associated with the campaign of Aetius in Raetia. The campaign ended with a quick and complete victory of the Romans. According to another inscription, Merobaudes distinguished himself in battle. He was honored with a statue at the Forum of Trajan.

It is assumed that Aetius did not chase the retreating Juthungi across the Danube River. Reports about the bad campaign against the Vandals in Africa forced him to interrupt his campaign. He returned with his army to Ravenna for consultation. However, the consultation with his colleague *magister militum praesentalis* Felix, about the following strategy led to a crisis. According to Wijendaele, the rivalry between Aetius and Felix was the basis for this. This one erupted because Aëtius had to give up part of his force before the war against the Vandals. There broke out mutiny at this army unit that committed an attack on Felix. He was murdered along with his wife. Prosper points to Aëtius as if he had had a hand in this.

In 431 Aetius resumed his campaign in the northern Alps, this time he deployed his army against the rebellious inhabitants of the province of Noricum. The Nori revolt was violently defeated. According to Wijendaele, he burned the province and returned to Italy loaded with loot. The games held in Rome in 432 in his honor were financed with this.

After the fall of Felix, Aëtius has become the most powerful soldier of the Western Roman Empire. Aetius' performance put evil blood on the imperial authority in Ravenna. The tension between the quirky general and Galla Placidia led her to put all her pawns on Bonifatius and she dropped Aetius. When Aëtius left Italy in 432 to participate in the war against the Franks, she lets Bonifatius return from Africa and appoints him as her new commander in chief. Aëtius's reaction is not long in coming and a Roman civil war breaks out between him and Bonifatius.

A number of contemporary historians: Priscus, Prosper, Hydatius report on a campaign against the Juthungi and the Nori in 430 and 431 by Aëtius. Background information on the how and why of this campaign is largely lacking. Only Prosper lights up a tip of the veil by telling that there was a conspiracy against Aetius by Felix and Galla Placidia, and that Felix was murdered by Aetius. In addition to the circumstances that Aetius kept away in the conflict between Felix and Bonifatius and did not contribute to the war against the Vandals see current historians accusing Prosper of an indication that the two main generals of the Western army did not cooperate, or that there was a high-escending conflict that to an eruption came.

The order of the events do not match in the sources. In general, more importance is attached to that of Hydatius because he visited Aëtius as an envoy on a diplomatic mission. If one maintains the order of Hydatius' events, Aëtius first campaigned against a group of Goths near Arles in the early spring of 430, before targeting the Juthungen and Nori. It was only after he had defeated the Goths did Aetius leave for the Alps.

WAR WITH BONIFACIUS

The Roman Civil War (432) was a military conflict between the Roman generals Aetius and Bonifatius during the reign of Emperor Valentinian III. This war took place on Italian soil and was decided in the Battle of Rimini. Despite Aetius losing the battle, the civil war ended in his favor, because Bonifatius was wounded in battle and eventually died of his injuries.

Besides the two generals, Galla Placidia was an important player as regentes. She made a not insignificant contribution to this conflict during her regency in the years 429 to 432. She was unable to prevent her two main generals from fighting each other instead of fighting the Vandals in present-day North-Africa and the Huns in Pannonia. With her decision in 432 to deprive Aetius of his command of the Roman army in favor of Boniface, she effectively created the basis for the arise of this conflict.

While Aetius was campaigning in Gaul, there was an ongoing power struggle among Aetius, Felix, Bonifacius, and the emperor Valentinian's mother and regent Galla Placidia. In 427 while Bonifacius was away as governor (comes) of Africa, Felix caused him to fall into disfavour with Placidia. Bonifacius was eventually returned to favor by Placidia, but only after Felix had sent Sigisvult and two other armies against him when Aetius warned him of Felix's intentions. In 429, the Vandals exploited this power struggle and crossed over to Africa.

After the execution of Felix in 430, Aetius and Bonifacius remained as the empire's most influential generals, both constantly vying for the favor of Placidia. In 432 Aetius held the consulate, but Bonifacius was recalled to Italy and received warmly by Placidia. Bonifacius was given the rank of patrician and made the senior comes et magister utriusque militiae, while Aetius was stripped of his military command. Aetius, believing his fall now imminent, marched against Bonifacius and fought him at the Battle of Rimini. Bonifacius won the battle but was mortally wounded, dying a few months later. Aetius escaped to Pannonia and traveled to the court of his friend, Rugila, the king of the Huns. With their help he returned to power, receiving the title of comes et magister utriusque militiae. Aetius then had Bonifacius' son-in-law, Sebastianus, who had succeeded Bonifacius as magister militum, exiled from Italy to Constantinople, bought the properties of Bonifacius, and married his widow Pelagia.

Boniface and Aetius were both ambitious generals who emerged in the turbulent period after the death of Emperor Honorius in 423. They became involved in a series of political and military confrontations, including Joannes (423-425) who was proclaimed emperor by the Senate against the heirs of Honorius: his wife Galla Placida with her minor son Valentinian and his cousin Theodosius II, emperor of the East Roman Empire. In 425, a civil war broke out that was won by the heirs of Honorius. After this, Aetius, who supported John, was promoted away to the province Gallia and Boniface, a follower of Galla Placidia, ended up on a sideline.

Bonifatius disagreed the course of events as it went after the fall of John. Therefore he refused to leave his post in North Africa. Through his marriage to the Gothic Princess Pelagia, he had a private army of mainly Gothic Bucellari and the regular army in Africa, the Comitatenses, had remained loyal to him. This allowed him to be independent and to take his own course.

A new confrontation arose when a plot against Boniface was forged in 427. Bonifatius separated North-Africa from the empire. That period is known as the Civil war of 427-429. In this conflict, Boniface and the commander-in-chief of the Roman army Felix were each other's opponents. This conflict ended when Galla Placidia reconciled with Boniface. Aetius kept himself during this conflict aside until he was ranked to the rank of magister militum in 429. This was the junior rank of the two functions of comes et magister utriusque militiae, whose senior position was held by Felix, who was thus the most influential man in those years, and also a supporter of Galla Placidia.

After Bonifatius had left Ravenna in 429 to reconcile with Galla Placida, he returned to North Africa to campaign against the Vandals. They had conquered Mauretania Tingitana and Mauretania by 430 and now began to invade the Numidia region, where Bonifatius was waiting for them with his army. In the Battle of Calama, the Romans were defeated by the Vandals in early 430, after which Bonifatius withdrew to the city of Hippo Regius which was besieged from May 430. During the siege, the famous church father Augustinus died. After 14 months of siege, Bonifatius left the city to the Vandal King and withdrew to join forces with the East Roman general Aspar, who arrived from Constantinople with an army by sea. In early 432 they joined against Geiserik, but the Romans again were defeated.

Reportedly Felix began after the promotion of Aetius, a conspiracy against him, but Aetius was Felix ahead and planned an assassination attempt. In May 430, Felix and his wife were murdered in the Ursiana Basilica in Ravenna. After Felix's death Aetius obtained the position of senior magister militum. Nevertheless, he left Italy to return to Gaul, where he defeated an army of plundering Goths near Arles, turned around and began a campaign in the Alps against plundering Iuthungi and Bagaudae in Raetia and Noricum. According to Wijnendaele, these actions of Aetius were carried out without the approval of the imperial government in Ravenna, and his campaigns in Gaul and Noricum were the result of the unwillingness of the army or of his Huns to participate in an overseas campaign against the Vandals in Africa. Instead of this he suppressed the raids in the north from where he easily could monitor the imperial seat of Ravenna, before campaigning against the Franks.

After the execution of Felix in 430, Aetius and Bonifatius remained as the most influential generals of the empire, both fighting for the favor of Placidia. In 432, Aetius held the consulate, an honorary function, but Bonifatius was recalled to Italy in that year, warmly received by Placidia and received the rank of patrician, also an honorary function. In addition, she gave him the senior comes et magister utriusque milities (commander-in-chief) position, while Aetius was deprived of his military command. With these decisions she created an explosive situation.

Aetius, who believed his fall was now imminent, openly revolted against the imperial authority in Ravenna. He marched from Gaul against Bonifatius who stayed in Ravenna. Aetius had brought his own army from the West that he originally intended to deploy to the Suebi in Spain, while Bonifatius had some of his troops from Africa with him, most bucellarii and the Italian fieldarmy. The two warlords competed against each other five Roman miles outside of Arminium (the current city Rimini) in 432.

When the battle was over, Bonifatius had triumphed, but he would not enjoy his victory for long. He was injured during the battle and a few months later he died of a slaughter wound.

After Bonifatius' death, his son-in-law Sebastianus took over his position as commander-in-chief and continued the battle in Italy. He tried to capture Aetius who had retreated to one of his fortified estates in Italy after the lost battle. However, Aetius managed to flee and sought a good get-over with the Huns in Pannonia. Here he traveled to the court of his friend, the Hun King Rua, and after acquiring a new army, he returned to Italy.

With the help of this army, Aetius became the winning party. He reconciled himself with Galla Placidia who again offered him the title of es et magister utriusque militias (commander-in-chief). Aetius then had Sebastianus exiled from Italy, seized the properties of Bonifatius and married his widow Pelagia. Aetius eventually had become the great victorer of this civil war an also became the most important Roman of the west. Galla Placida no longer played a meaningful role and in 437 she had to take a Seat when her son Valentinianus III became an adult. Valentinianus would turn out to be a weak emperor.

With the death of Bonifatius, a period where several generals had fought for the power of the West Roman Empire, had come to an end. This episode would not be without consequences, because it eventually cost the empire the important provinces Mauretania Tingitana, Mauretania Caesariensis, Africa and Pannonia. Aetius remained as the only one of the 'war lords' and had thus become the actual ruler, however he chose not to become emperor himself. With this decision, he broke the monopoly of the Western imperial government on violence, paving the way for future warlords- commanders and the disintegration of the Western army in the second half of the fifth century.

From 433 to 450, Aetius was the dominant figure in the Western Empire, obtaining the rank of *magnificus vir parens patriusque noster* (5 September 435) and playing the role of "protector" of Galla Placidia and Valentinian III while the Emperor was still young. At the same time he continued to devote attention to Gaul. In 436, the Burgundians of King Gundacar were defeated and obliged to accept peace by Aetius and Avitus; however, the following year he sent Hun *foederati* to destroy them. Allegedly 20,000 Burgundians were killed in a slaughter which probably became the basis of the Nibelungenlied, a German epic. That same year Aetius was probably in Armorica with Litorius to suppress a rebellion of the Bagaudae under a certain Tibatto. The year 437 saw his second consulship and the wedding of Valentinian and Licinia Eudoxia in Constantinople; it is probable that Aetius attended the ceremony that marked the restoration of the direct rule of the Emperor. At that time his general Litorius had broken the siege of Narbona and had turned the war in favor of the Romans. The following two years were occupied by a campaign against the Suebi and by the war against the Visigoths; in 438 Aetius won a major battle (probably the Battle of Mons Colubrarius), but in 439 the Visigoths defeated and killed Litorius and his Hun Foederati. Aetius returned to Gaul after Vetericus had stabilized the situation, and defeated the Visigoths and obtained a treaty. On his return to Italy, he was honoured by a statue erected by the Senate and the People of Rome by order of the Emperor; this was probably the occasion for the panegyric written by Merobaudes.

In 443, Aetius settled the remaining Burgundians in Sapaudia, south of Lake Geneva. His most pressing concern in the 440s was with problems in Gaul and Iberia, mainly with the Bagaudae. He settled the Alans around Valence in 440 and along the Loire including Aurelianum in 442 to contain unrest in Armorica.

In Spain, Aetius was slowly losing his grip on the situation. In 441 he appointed Asturius *Magister Militum per Hispanias*, in order to put down the Bagaudae in Tarraconensis. He was recalled and Merobaudes defeated the Bagaudae of Aracellitanus in 443. In 445 the Romans had the Vandals attack Turonium in Gallaecia, followed by Vitus who campaigned with a combined force of Romans and Goths in 446, but was ultimately defeated.

The Bagaudae in Armorica revolted again in 447 or 448, and were put down by the Alans of Goar. As a result, the leader of the revolt Eudoxius fled to the court of Attila the Hun. In 449 the Bagaudae in Spain revolted and sacked Tyriasso, Caesaragusta, and Illerdensus. The Suebi also entered Tarraconensis to assist Basilius and his revolt.

In 445 Majorian defeated a Frankish siege of Turonum, which was followed by a Frankish attack under Clodio in the region of Atrebatum, in Belgica Secunda. The *foederati* were stopped in an ambush near *Vicus Helena*, where Aetius directed the operations while his commander Majorian (later Emperor) fought with the cavalry. However, by 450 Aetius had already returned to good terms with the Franks. In 449 Chlodio died, and the *patricius* supported his younger son Merovaeus's claim to the throne. Aetius adopted him as his own son and sent him from Rome, where he had been an ambassador, to the Frankish court with many presents.

GOTHIC WAR OF 436 – 439

The Gothic War (436–439) was a military conflict between the Gothic foederati and the Western Roman Empire, under Emperor Valentinian III. It occurred primarily in the Gallic provinces from 436 to 439. The key figures involved were the Gothic leader Theodoric I and the Roman army's commander-in-chief, Aetius. Contemporary sources characterize this conflict as a war. Additionally, there were uprisings of the Burgundians and the Bagaudae during the same period.

The origins of the Gothic War (436–439) and the specific engagements that occurred during its course are poorly documented. The absence of comprehensive records detailing the battles makes it challenging to reconstruct the war's progression. Our available knowledge is derived primarily from fragmentary accounts provided by chroniclers, supplemented by occasional references found in the works of poets, rhetoricians, and theologians. Prosper is the most significant primary source documenting the events, with additional insights provided by Hydatius and Sidonius Apollinaris.

The Visigoths settled in Gallia Aquitaine as foederati after the Gothic War in Spain in 418. However, they proved to be unreliable between 418 and 435. In 426, a significant uprising against the Roman Empire occurred, which was quelled by military intervention led by Aetius. Furthermore, in 430, Aetius defeated a Gothic army.

As with the earlier rebellion of Theodoric I, the reason for this war is not clear from contemporary sources. Therefore, its origins must be inferred from the political situation of the Roman Empire at the time. The empire was relatively stable compared to the preceding decade, following the resolution of the Civil War between Bonifatius and Aetius, which concluded in favor of the latter. Consequently, Aetius became the most influential figure in the Western Empire from 433 to 450. He attained the rank of magnificus vir parens patriusque noster and assumed the role of 'protector' of the empress mother Galla Placidia and her young son Valentinian III.

However, new tensions arose with the emergence of formidable forces such as the Burgundian foederati under King Gunther, who wielded significant influence in eastern Gaul and posed a threat to Aetius. Furthermore, Theodoric I remained resolute in his quest for power, further complicating the political situation.

In 436, while the Roman army was dealing with a Bagaudae uprising in Gallia Lugdunensis and a resurgence of Burgundian activity, Theodoric terminated the treaty with the Romans. According to Hughes, an alliance formed between the Goths and the Burgundians, prompted by Theodoric's dissatisfaction with Roman rule and his desire to expand into areas bordering the Mediterranean.

Theodoric launched invasions into neighboring regions, prioritizing the capture of Narbonne, a key coastal city. His forces besieged the city, while also securing access to Spain by defeating garrisons stationed at the Pyrenean passes. The Roman army took some time to mobilize against the Goths. Aetius, the commander-in-chief of the Western Roman army, was in Italy attending games held to celebrate his appointment as patrician. The simultaneous outbreak of the Gothic and Burgundian revolts compelled him to deploy the army efficiently. In Gaul, he only had the Comitatenses field army at his disposal. General Litorius had already been sent to suppress the Bagaudae insurgents with a part of this force.

Aetius, who had established a delicate peace throughout his vast empire, was reluctant to lead the Goths with units from other regions, as he feared it would leave those areas vulnerable. Instead, he sent a delegation to the court of the Hun King Rua, requesting military assistance. Although the timing is uncertain, it is highly likely that in 436–437, the Huns were granted parts of Pannonia near the River Save. Prior to the arrival of this army in Gaul, Aetius utilized the available forces to suppress the combined Gothic and Burgundian uprising.

In 436, General Litorius successfully suppressed the Bacaudian uprising in Armorica. He then led his army southward and, in 437, joined forces with a contingent of Huns to quell the Gothic revolt.
Litorius focused his efforts on Narbonne, which was under siege by the Goths. However, upon the arrival of the Roman forces, the Goths retreated, leaving the city relieved. Subsequently, Litorius engaged the Goths in Aquitaine, shifting the conflict to the heartland of Gothic territory. Theodoric's army found itself progressively pushed into a defensive position, eventually retreating to its stronghold in the capital, Toulouse, which came under siege by the Romans. Following a prolonged siege, Theodoric eventually surrendered to General Litorius.

The siege of Narbonne was a conflict between the Visigothic Foederati of Aquitania and the Western Roman Empire. The siege began in late 436 and carried over into 437, when the Roman Magister Militum Litorius arrived with a force of Huns and the Gallic Field Army. Litorius surprised the Visigoths and routed their army before they could draw up a coherent battle line. Prosper of Aquitaine records that to alleviate the starvation of the city, each soldier in Litorius' army was ordered to carry two measures of wheat for the citizens of Narbonne.

Theodoric was forced to lay down his arms and honor the treaty with the Romans, which obligated him to provide troops to the Roman army in the event of a setback against the Suebi in Spain in 438. Despite the reconciliation between the Goths and Romans, hostilities resumed. Historians speculate that developments in Spain and the Mediterranean, where the Vandals were increasingly engaged in piracy, contributed to this resurgence of conflict. Sources indicate a renewed large-scale war that initially challenged the Goths.

Upon Aetius's return to Ravenna following the marriage of Valentinian III and Licinia Eudoxia in Constantinople in early 438, he made changes to the command structure of the army in Gaul. Avitus, likely serving as magister militum per Gallias, assumed the role of praefectus praetorio Galliarum, with Litorius succeeding him. Aetius himself temporarily assumed supreme command and actively participated in the war effort.

One of the few notable achievements documented regarding Aëtius' involvement recounts a significant victory he achieved in a pivotal battle, during which he purportedly vanquished 8,000 Goths.

Given the political exigencies in Ravenna, Aëtius found it necessary to entrust the continuation of the Gothic war to Litorius after this engagement. In recognition of his efforts, the emperor commissioned the erection of a statue in his honor, with Merobaudes delivering laudatory remarks. Presumably, Aëtius possessed ample confidence in the strategic acumen of his generals, Litorius and Sigisvult, particularly considering the substantial setback the Goths had previously suffered.

The Battle of Mons Colubrarius was a battle in the Gothic War from 436 to 439. It was one of the many armed conflicts between the Gothic people and the Western Roman Empire during the first half of the fifth century. The main protagonists in the war were the Visigothic king Theodoric I and the commander-in-chief of the Western army General Aetius. The battle probably was fought near the French village Olonzac around 438.

In the Gothic war that erupted in 436, the Goths initially had a predominance, but were forced to lay down their arms as a result of the successful offensive of the Romans under the leadership of Litorius in 437. The opponents made peace that, however, was short-lived, because the following year the war broke out again in all intensity. Also this time the Goths were the instigators and lay domestic problems in Spain and piracy in the Mediterranean underlied this. The Romans made preparations for a new campaign and on this occasion Aetius personally took command.
The Battle of Mons Colubrarius is known from only one source. The Roman poet Merobaudes refers to it in his Panegyric in honor of Emperor Valentinian III and his commander-in-chief Aetius:

> *«All the forces of the Goths... had set out with their king to destroy Roman territory... On the mountain that the Ancients call... Snake mountain [Mons Colubrarius]... he surprised as is his custom and killed most of the enemy; Once the infantry units, which were very numerous, had fled, he himself pursued the spreading cavalry troops and overwhelmed those who stood steadfast with his army, and those who fled with his eager speed. Shortly afterwards, the king appeared on stage with his remaining troops and was stunned to see all the trampled bodies... [here the text ends].« Merobaudes, Panegyric 1, fragment IIA, 10f*

This hymn was pronounced in 438 by Merobaudes at the festive unveiling of a statue of the general commissioned by the emperor. According to historians like Ian Hughes, the battle to which the court poet refers in his poem must have taken place in the Gothic War of 436–439. Aetius was honored on that occasion for his victory over the Goths.

From the hymn it can be said that Aetius did not achieve his victory after a conventional battle. There were no two armies facing each other here prior to the battle. Aetius surprised the Goths when their captain Theodoric was absent with part of his army.

Aetius achieved an important victory, because reportedly he slaughtered 8,000 Goths on the battlefield. Although the extent of the victory and the number of losses suffered by the Goths are undoubtedly exaggerated by Merobaudes – since this was a hymn – it seems that Theodorik had to take a major setback. However, the defeat was not final, as the Gothic king refused to capitulate and after that the war continued until 439. It is not certain exactly where the battle took place. Nevertheless, there is a good theory where the Mons Colubrarius, which means Snake Mountain, is located.

Near the French village of Olonzac, south of Gaul, lies a small hill called de Roc de la Garde Roland. From a 12th-century manuscript, it is told of a battle that took place here at the time of Charles the Great, about three centuries after the Gothic War of 436–439. A companion of Charlemagne, Bishop Turpin, questions a Saracen in the manuscript after the battle, who tells him that his house is at Petra Colobram, and that that hill would later be named Roc de la Garde Roland. In addition to the fact that the text thus seems to confirm this place as the location of the battle, the location lends itself well to a fight.

In 439, the Visigoths were forced to retreat to their capital, Toulouse, due to increasing defensive pressure from the Romans. The Roman army, led by General Litorius, besieged Toulouse. King Theodoric I of the Visigoths attempted to attack the Roman camp during the siege but failed, resulting in heavy losses for his army. According to Prosper, "Due to the thoughtfulness of the Romans, the opportunities turned and the Goths became the parent party". Additionally, after the failed attack, General Litorius was captured by the Goths and executed.

In the midst of the ensuing chaos, Vetericus, a Goth serving in the Roman army, temporarily assumed leadership. Prosper's brief statement "in the same period Vetericus was considered loyal to our state and known for the frequent demonstration of his skill in war". Vetericus successfully stabilized the situation following Theodoric's disastrous attempt. Subsequent battles occurred, and the Romans dispatched new troops, mainly consisting of auxiliary forces from the Huns, to confront the Goths.

The Battle of Toulouse was fought between the Visigoths and the Western Roman Empire in 439. Having previously defeated the Visigoths at Narbonne, the Roman general Litorius led his largely Hunnic army against Toulouse, the capital of the Visigothic Kingdom. During the siege, the Visigothic king Theodoric I attacked the Roman camp and inflicted heavy casualties. Litorius was captured and executed. Since the Visigoths also suffered heavy losses, Theodoric made peace with the Roman governor Avitus.

In response to the emergent situation, Aetius took command of the Gallic army. In 439, Aetius traveled southward to end the conflict. Aetius aimed to conclude the war with a significant triumph, boosting morale in the West and thwarting further Gothic expansionist endeavors. He hastened towards Toulouse and initiated the siege of a Gothic military encampment near their capital. After a short break to build siege towers, Theodoric's forces breached the camp's defenses and overwhelmed its defenders, leaving them with no escape. Ultimately, the Romans emerged victorious, and the Visigoths suffered significant losses. Aetius was forced to make peace with the Visigoths, because he had to deploy part of his troops against the Vandals in the Vandal War, who had meanwhile taken Carthago.

The peace talks with Goths were conducted by the praetorian prefect Eparchius Avitus According to Sidonius Apollinaris, it was largely thanks to his commitment that Theodoric made peace. The peace was in a way unsatisfactory for the Romans, because the victory was not complete and the Roman army had also come out of the battle battered. Probably some of the peace conditions held the departure of the Alans, who had previously abandoned the Visigoths, from Aquitaine. Hydatius and Prosper date this peace in 439. The exact date would probably have been late in 439 or early 440, because it is known that Aetius returned to Italy in 440

The Roman victory assured future Gothic submission for more than twenty years. Apart from a brief interlude under Thorismund, the Goths were loyal allies of the imperial government.

HUNNIC INVASIONS OF GAUL AND ITALY

Before 449 Aetius had signed an agreement with the Huns, allowing some of them to settle in Pannonia, along the Sava River; he also sent to Attila, the king of the Huns, a man called Constantius as a secretary. In 449, Attila was angry over an alleged theft of a golden plate, and Aetius sent him an embassy under Romulus to calm him; Attila sent him a dwarf, Zerco, as a present, whom Aetius gave back to his original owner, Aspar.

However, the good terms between Romans and Huns did not last, as Attila wanted to attack Roman Gaul; he knew that Aetius was a serious obstacle to his enterprise, and tried to have him removed, but in 451, when the Huns attacked, Aetius was still the commander of the Roman army in Gaul. The large Hunno-German army captured several cities, and proceeded towards Aurelianum.

Aetius, with the help of the influential Gallo-Roman senator Avitus, convinced the Visigoths of king Theodoric I to join him against the external menace; he also succeeded in persuading Sambida (who was falsely accused of planning to join the Huns), the Armoricans, the Salian Franks, some of the Saxons, and the Burgundians of Sapaudia to join his forces. Then the joint Roman and Visigothic army moved to relieve the besieged city of Aurelianum, forcing the Huns to abandon the siege and retreat to open country.

On 20 June 451 Aetius and Theodoric engaged Attila and his allies at the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains. Theodoric died in the battle, and Aetius suggested his son Thorismund retreat to Tolosa to secure his throne, and persuaded Merovaeus to return to the lands of the Franks; for this reason it is said that Aetius kept all of the battlefield loot for his army.

THE BATTLE OF CATALAUNIAN PLAINS

The Battle of the Catalaunian Plains (or Fields), also called the Battle of the Campus Mauriacus, Battle of Châlons, Battle of Troyes or the Battle of Maurica, took place on June 20, 451 AD, between a victorious coalition, led by the Roman general Flavius Aetius and the Visigothic king Theodoric I, against the Huns and their vassals, commanded by their king, Attila. It proved to be one of the last major military operations of the Western Roman Empire, although Germanic foederati composed the majority of the coalition army. The exact strategic significance is disputed. Historians generally agree that the siege of Aurelianum was the decisive moment in the campaign[citation needed] and stopped the Huns' attempt to advance any further into Roman territory or establish vassals in Roman Gaul. However, the Huns looted and pillaged much of Gaul and crippled the military capacity of the Romans and Visigoths. Attila died only two years later, in 453. After the Battle of Nedao in 454, the coalition of the Huns and the incorporated Germanic vassals gradually disintegrated.

By 450 AD, the Romans had restored their authority in much of the province of Gaul, although control over all of the provinces beyond Italy was continuing to diminish. Armorica was only nominally part of the empire, and Germanic tribes occupying Roman territory had been forcibly settled and bound by treaty as Foederati under their own leaders. Northern Gaul between the Rhine north of Xanten and the Lys (Germania Inferior) had unofficially been abandoned to the Salian Franks. The Visigoths on the Garonne were growing restive, but still holding to their treaty. The Burgundians in Sapaudia were more submissive, but likewise awaiting an opening for revolt. The Alans on the Loire and in Valentinois were more loyal, having served the Romans since the defeat of Jovinus in 411 and the Siege of Bazas in 414. The parts of Gaul still securely in Roman control were the Mediterranean coastline; a region including Aurelianum (present-day Orléans) along the Seine and the Loire as far north as Soissons and Arras; the middle and upper Rhine to Cologne; and downstream along the Rhône.

The historian Jordanes states that Attila was enticed by the Vandal king Genseric to wage war on the Visigoths. At the same time, Genseric would attempt to sow strife between the Visigoths and the Western Roman Empire. However, Jordanes' account of Gothic history is notoriously unreliable. Modern scholars believe that this explanation was Jordanes projecting contemporary events and political opinions onto Attila's time, and it was likely not original to Priscus. Christiensen points out that Amalafrida, wife of Thrasamund, was imprisoned and murdered by Hilderic after Thrasamund's death in 523, and that the tale of the blinding of Theodoric's daughter by Huneric was a fabrication.

Other contemporary writers offer different motivations: Justa Grata Honoria, the sister of the emperor Valentinian III, had been betrothed to the former consul Bassus Herculanus the year before. In 450, she sent the eunuch Hyacinthus to the Hunnic king asking for Attila's help in escaping her confinement, with her ring as proof of the letter's legitimacy. Allegedly, Attila interpreted it as offering her hand in marriage, and he had claimed half of the empire as a dowry. He demanded Honoria to be delivered along with the dowry. Valentinian rejected these demands, and Attila used it as an excuse to launch a destructive campaign through Gaul. Hughes suggests that the reality of this interpretation should be that Honoria was using Attila's status as honorary magister militum for political leverage.

Another conflict leading into the war was that in 449, the King of the Franks (possibly Chlodio) had died and that his two sons argued over the succession: while the older son sought Attila's help, the younger sided with Aetius, who adopted him. The identity of the younger prince, who was seen at Rome by the historian Priscus, remains unclear, though both Merowech and Childeric I have been suggested.

Attila crossed the Rhine early in 451 with his followers and a large number of allies, sacking Divodurum (now Metz) on April 7. Schultheis notes, however, that sacking of Metz on April 7 may have been a literary trope used by Hydatius and Gregory of Tours to emphasize Attila's pagan nature to a Christian audience and may not be reliable. Other cities attacked can be determined by the hagiographies written to commemorate their bishops: Nicasius was slaughtered before the altar of his church in Reims; Servatius is alleged to have saved Tongeren with his prayers, as Genevieve is to have saved Lutetia. Lupus, bishop of Troyes, is also credited with saving his city by meeting Attila in person. Many other cities also claim to have been attacked in these accounts, although archaeological evidence shows no destruction layer dating to the timeframe of the invasion. The most likely explanation for Attila's widespread devastation of Gaul is that Attila's main column followed the Roman roads and crossed the Rhine at Argentoratum (Strasbourg) before marching to Borbetomagus (Worms), Mogontiacum (Mainz), Augusta Treverorum (Trier), Divodurum (Metz), Durocotorum (Reims), and finally Aurelianum (Orléans), while sending a small detachment north into Frankish territory to plunder the countryside. This explanation would support the literary evidence claiming North Gaul was attacked, and the archaeological evidence showing major population centers were not sacked.

Attila's army had reached Aurelianum (modern Orléans, France) before June. According to Jordanes, the Alan king Sangiban, whose Foederati realm included Aurelianum, had promised to open the city gates. This siege is confirmed by the account of the Vita S. Aniani and in the later account of Gregory of Tours, although Sangiban's name does not appear in their accounts. However, the inhabitants of Aurelianum shut their gates against the advancing invaders, and Attila began to besiege the city, while he waited for Sangiban to deliver on his promise. There are two different accounts of the Siege of Aurelianum, and Hughes suggests that combining them provides a better understanding of what actually happened. After four days of heavy rain, Attila began his final assault on June 14, which was broken off due to the approach of the Roman coalition. Modern scholars tend to agree that the Siege of Aurelianum was the high point of Attila's attack on the West, and the staunch Alan defence of the city was the real decisive factor in the war of 451. Contrary to Jordanes, the Alans were never planning to defect as they were the loyal backbone of the Roman defence in Gaul.

Both armies consisted of combatants from many peoples. Besides the Roman troops, the Alans, and the Visigoths, Jordanes lists Aetius' allies as including the Francii, Sarmatae, Armoriciani, Liticiani, Burgundiones, Saxones, Riparii, and Olibrones (whom he describes as "once Roman soldiers and now the flower of the allied forces"), as well as "other Celtic or German tribes." The Liticiani could be either Laeti or Romano-Britons, the latter of which are recorded by Gregory. Halsall argues that the Rhine limitanei and the old British field army composed the forces of the Riparii and Armoricans, and Heather suggests that the Visigoths may have been able to field about 25,000 men total. Drinkwater adds that a faction of Alemanni may have participated in the battle, possibly on both sides like the Franks and Burgundians. The Olibrones remain unknown, although it has been suggested these were Germanic limitanei garrisons. Schultheis argues that on paper, the Germanic federates could theoretically number more than 70,000, but likely numbered under 50,000.

A sense of the size of the actual Roman army may be found in the study of the Notitia Dignitatum by A.H.M. Jones. This document is a list of officials and military units that was last updated in the first decades of the fifth century. The Notitia Dignitatum lists 58 regular units, and 33 limitanei serving either in the Gallic provinces or on the frontiers nearby; the total of these units, based on Jones' analysis, is 34,000 for the regular units and 11,500 for the limitanei, or just under 46,000 all told. This figure is an estimate for the years 395–425 and one that changes with new research. The loss of the Western Roman provinces in North Africa resulted in the loss of funding for 40,000 infantry and 20,000 cavalry in the Roman army, in addition to previous losses, which was enough to permanently cripple Roman military capacity after 439 AD. According to Herwig Wolfram, with an annual revenue of 40,000 pounds of gold in 450 AD, the Western Empire would have had to spend almost two thirds of its income to maintain an army of 30,000 men.

Hugh Elton gives the same figure in 450, but estimates the cost of maintaining an army of 300,000 at 31,625 lbs. of gold or 7.6 solidi a year per soldier. He states that there were also other unquantifiable military costs such as defensive installations, equipment, supplies, paper, animals and other costs. The size of the army in 450 AD therefore must have been significantly reduced from its status in the late 420s. Schultheis argues that the Roman field army as calculated from his own estimates of the Notitia Dignitatum, chronology of military losses, and income losses numbered approximately 20,500 comitatenses and 18,000 limitanei by the time of the battle, not including supernumerary officers.

Jordanes' list for Attila's allies includes the Gepids under their king Ardaric, as well as an army of various Gothic groups led by the brothers Valamir, Theodemir (the father of the later Ostrogothic king Theodoric the Great) and Videmir, scions of the Amali Goths. Sidonius Apollinaris offers a more extensive list of allies: Rugians, Gepids, Geloni, Burgundians, Sciri, Bellonoti, Neuri, Bastarnae, Thuringians, Bructeri, and Franks living along the River Neckar. E.A. Thompson expresses his suspicions that some of these names are drawn from literary traditions rather than from the event,

> *The Bastarnae, Bructeri, Geloni and Neuri had disappeared hundreds of years before the time of the Huns, while the Bellonoti had never existed at all: presumably the learned poet was thinking of the Balloniti, a people invented by Valerius Flaccus nearly four centuries earlier.*

On the other hand, Thompson believes that the presence of Burgundians on the Hunnic side is credible, noting that a group is documented remaining east of the Rhine; he believes that the other peoples Sidonius mentions (the Rugians, Sciri, and Thuringians) were participants in this battle. Although there is no direct evidence that Heruli were present, as indirect evidence, centuries later Pauls Diaconus listed the subject peoples who Attila could call upon in addition to the better known Goths and Gepids: "Marcomanni, Suebi, Quadi, and alongside them the Herules, Thuringi and Rugii".

Thompson remarks in a footnote, "I doubt that Attila could have fed an army of even 30,000 men". Lindner argues that by crossing the Carpathians to the area of modern Hungary the Huns had forfeited their best logistic base and grazing grounds, and that the Great Hungarian Plain could only support 15,000 mounted nomads. Schultheis notes that Attila had control of other Hunnic groups east of the Carpathians, and proposes the eastern half of Attila's empire could field an additional 7,000 to 12,000 men based on later 6th century sources. Kim notes that the Huns continued use of the Xiongnu decimal system, meaning their army was probably organized into divisions of 10, 100, 1000, and 10,000, but no real estimates of Hunnic military capacity can be determined. Their barbarian allies do receive mentions at other times in other sources: in 430 CE. The Hunnish king Octar was defeated by a force of 3,000 Neckar Burgundians who would later come under Hun subjugation, and Heather estimates that the Gepids and the Amali Goths could have each fielded a maximum of 15,000 men at the Battle of Nedao in 454. Schultheis argues that when combining primary and secondary source estimates Attila's forces would number more than 100,000 on paper, but was likely closer to 70,000. The Chronicon Paschale, which preserves an extremely abbreviated and garbled fragment of Priscus' account of the campaign, states that Attila's forces numbered in the tens of thousands. Assuming that the Hunnic and Germanic forces were roughly the same size as the Roman and federate army, those involved in the battle could have been well in excess of 100,000 combatants in total. This excludes the inevitable servants and camp followers who usually escape mention in the primary sources.

The actual location of the Catalaunian Fields has long been considered unclear. The current scholarly consensus is that there is no conclusive site, merely being that it is in the vicinity of Châlons-en-Champagne (formerly called Châlons-sur-Marne) or Troyes. Historian Thomas Hodgkin located the site near Méry-sur-Seine. A more recent evaluation of the location has been performed by Phillippe Richardot, who proposed a location of La Cheppe, slightly north of the modern town of Châlons.

In 1842, at Pouan-les-Vallées, a village on the south bank of the river Aube, a labourer uncovered a burial containing a skeleton, a number of jewels and gold ornaments, and two swords. By the nature of its grave goods, it was initially thought to be the burial of Theodoric, but Hodgkin expressed skepticism, suggesting that this elite burial was that of a princely Germanic warrior who had lived in the fifth century. The Treasure of Pouan is conserved in the Musée des beaux-arts de Troyes, Troyes. It is still not known whether the find is related to the battle.

Simon Macdowall in his 2015 Osprey title proposed the battle took place at Montgueux just west of Troyes. Macdowall goes as far as to identify the Roman alliance's camp site being placed at Fontvannes, a few kilometers west of the proposed battlefield, and places Attila's camp on the Seine at Saint-Lyé. This draws on the earlier work of M. Girard, who was able to identify Maurica as the "les Maures" ridge of Montgueux, based on the second Additamenta Altera to Prosper's Epitoma Chronicon, which states it took place five Roman miles from Tecis or Tricasses, the modern Troyes. The road in the region is known as the "Voie des Maures", and the base of the ridge is known as "l'enfer" to the locals. A small stream near the battlefield that runs to Troyes is known as "la Riviere de Corps" to this day. According to MacDowall, modern maps continue to identify the plains in the region as the "les Maurattes." Iaroslav Lebedensky argued the battle likely stretched across the plain from Montgueux south to Tourvellieres, while Schultheis argues that the battle took place wholly on the "les Maures" ridge itself until its final phase, when retreating and pursuing forces stretched across several kilometers. The ridge at Montgueux is currently the most thoroughly researched proposal for the battlefield location.

Upon learning of the invasion, the magister utriusque militiae Flavius Aetius moved his army rapidly from Italy to Gaul. According to Sidonius Apollinaris, he was leading a force consisting of "few and sparse auxiliaries without one regular soldier." The insignificant number of Roman troops reported is probably due to the fact the majority of Aetius' army was stationed in Gaul, combined with Sidonius' need to embellish the account in favor of Avitus. Aetius immediately attempted to persuade Theodoric I, king of the Visigoths, to join him. Allegedly, Theodoric learned how few troops Aetius had with him and decided it was wiser to wait and oppose the Huns in his own lands, so Aetius then turned to the former Praetorian Prefect of Gaul, Avitus, for help. According to tradition, Avitus was not only able to persuade Theodoric to join the Romans, but also a number of other wavering barbarian residents in Gaul. The coalition assembled at Arelate (Arles) before moving to meet the Goths at Tolosa (Toulouse), and the army was supplied by Tonantius Ferreolus, who had been preparing for a Hunnic attack for a few years. The combined army then marched to Aurelianum (present-day Orléans), reaching that city on June 14.

From Aurelianum, Aetius and his coalition pursued Attila, who was leaving Gaul with the majority of his objectives completed. According to Jordanes, the night before the main battle, some of the Franks allied with the Romans encountered a band of the Gepids loyal to Attila and engaged them in a skirmish. Jordanes' recorded number of 15,000 dead on either side for this skirmish is not verifiable. Attila had set up a tactical delay along his route of retreat in order to keep Aetius from catching him before he arrived at a suitable battlefield location. The two forces at last met somewhere on the Catalaunian Fields circa June 20, a date first proposed by J. B. Bury and since accepted by many, although some authors have proposed the first week of July or September 27. The date of the battle can be secured to June by the entries of Hydatius' chronicle, which places it in-between the appearance and disappearance of Halley's Comet.

According to tradition, Attila had his diviners examine the entrails of a sacrifice the morning of the day of the battle. They foretold that disaster would befall the Huns, but one of the enemy leaders would be killed. Attila delayed until the ninth hour (about 2:30 pm) so the impending sunset would help his troops to flee the battlefield in case of defeat. Hughes takes his own interpretation of this, noting that the divination may be an indicator of Attila's barbarity and therefore possibly a fabrication. He states that the choice to begin the battle at the ninth hour was due to the fact that both sides spent the entire day carefully deploying their coalition armies.

According to Jordanes, the Catalaunian plain rose on one side by a sharp slope to a ridge; this geographical feature dominated the battlefield and became the center of the battle. The Huns first seized the right side of the ridge, while the Romans seized the left, with the crest unoccupied between them. Jordanes explains that the Visigoths held the right side, the Romans the left, with Sangiban of uncertain loyalty and his Alans surrounded in the middle. The Hunnic forces attempted to take the ridge, but were outstripped by the Romans under Aetius and the Goths under Thorismund.

Jordanes goes on to state that Theodoric, whilst leading his own men against the enemy Amali Goths, was killed in the assault without his men noticing. He then states that Theodoric was either thrown from his horse and trampled to death by his advancing men, or slain by the spear of the Amali Andag. Since Jordanes served as the notary of Andag's son Gunthigis, even if this latter story is not true, this version was certainly a proud family tradition.

Then Jordanes claims the Visigoths outstripped the speed of the Alans beside them and fell upon Attila's own Hunnic household unit. Attila was forced to seek refuge in his own camp, which he had fortified with wagons. The Romano-Gothic charge apparently swept past the Hunnic camp in pursuit; when night fell, Thorismund, son of king Theodoric, returning to friendly lines, mistakenly entered Attila's encampment. There he was wounded in the ensuing melee before his followers could rescue him. Darkness also separated Aetius from his own men. As he feared that disaster had befallen them, he spent the rest of the night with his Gothic allies.

On the following day, finding the battlefield was "piled high with bodies and the Huns did not venture forth", the Goths and Romans met to decide their next move. Knowing that Attila was low on provisions and "was hindered from approaching by a shower of arrows placed within the confines of the Roman camp", they started to besiege his camp. In this desperate situation, Attila remained unbowed and "heaped up a funeral pyre of horse saddles, so that if the enemy should attack him, he was determined to cast himself into the flames, that none might have the joy of wounding him and that the lord of so many races might not fall into the hands of his foes".

While Attila was besieged in his camp, the Visigoths searched for their missing king and his son Thorismund. After a long search, they found Theodoric's corpse "where the dead lay thickest" and bore him away with heroic songs in sight of the enemy. Upon learning of his father's death, Thorismund wanted to assault Attila's camp, but Aetius dissuaded him. According to Jordanes, Aetius feared that if the Huns were completely destroyed, the Visigoths would break off their allegiance to the Roman Empire and become an even graver threat. So Aetius persuaded Thorismund to return home quickly and secure the throne for himself, before his brothers could. Otherwise, civil war would ensue among the Visigoths. Thorismund quickly returned to Tolosa (present-day Toulouse) and became king without any resistance. Gregory of Tours claims Aetius used the same reasoning to dismiss his Frankish allies, and collected the booty of the battlefield for himself.

The primary sources give little information as to the outcome of the battle, barring Jordanes. All emphasize the casualty count of the battle, and the battle became increasingly seen as a Gothic victory, beginning with Cassiodorus in the early sixth century.[79]

Hydatius states:

> *The Huns broke the peace and plundered the Gallic provinces. A great many cities were taken. On the Catalaunian Plains, not far from the city of Metz, which they had taken, the Huns were cut down in battle with the aid of God and defeated by general Aetius and King Theoderic, who had made a peace treaty with each other. The darkness of night interrupted the fighting. King Theoderic was laid low there and died. Almost 300,000 men are said to have fallen in that battle. — Hydatius, Chronicon, 150.*

Prosper, contemporary to the battle, states:

> *After killing his brother, Attila was strengthened by the resources of the deceased and forced many thousands of neighboring peoples into a war. This war, he announced as a guardian of Roman friendship, he would wage only against the Goths. But when he had crossed the Rhine and many Gallic cities had experienced his savage attacks, both our people and the Goths soon agreed to oppose with allied forces the fury of their proud enemies. And Aetius had such great foresight that, when fighting men were hurriedly collected from everywhere, a not unequal force met the opposing multitude. Although the slaughter of all those who died there was incalculable – for neither side gave way – it appears that the Huns were defeated in this battle because those among them that survived lost their taste for fighting and turned back home. —Prosper, Epitoma Chronicon, s.a. 451.*

The battle raged five miles down from Troyes on the field called Maurica in Campania. —Additamenta ad Chronicon Prosperi Hauniensis, s.a. 451.

At this time Attila, king of the Huns, invaded the Gauls. Here trusting in lord Peter the apostle himself patrician Aetius proceeded against him, he would fight with the help of God. —Continuatio Codex Ovetensis. Battle was made in the Gauls between Aetius and Attila king of the Huns with both peoples and massacre. Attila fled into the greater Gauls. —Continuatio Codex Reichenaviensis.

The Gallic Chronicles of 452 and 511 state:

> *Attila entered Gaul as if he had the right to ask for a wife that was owed to him. There, he inflicted and suffered defeat and then withdrew to his homeland. —Chronica Gallica Anno 452, s.a. 451.*

> *Patrician Aetius with King Theodoric of the Goths fight against Attila king of the Huns at Tricasses on the Mauriac plain, where Theodoric was slain, by whom it is uncertain, and Laudaricus the relative of Attila: and the bodies were countless. —Chronica Gallica Anno 511, s.a. 451.*

The Paschale Chronicle, preserving a garbled and abbreviated passage of Priscus, states:

> *While Theodosius and Valentinian, the Augusti, were emperors, Attila, from the race of the Gepid Huns, marched against Rome and Constantinople with a multitude of many tens of thousands. He notified Valentinian, the emperor of Rome, through a Gothic ambassador, "Attila, my master and yours, orders you through me to make ready the palace for him." He gave the same notice to Theodosius, the emperor in Constantinople, through a Gothic ambassador. Aetius, the first man of senatorial rank in Rome, heard the excessive daring of Attila's desperate response and went off to Alaric in Gaul, who was an enemy of Rome because of Honorius. He urged him to join him in standing against Attila, since he had destroyed many Roman cities. They unexpectedly launched himself against him as he was bivouacked near the Danubios river, and cut down his many thousands. Alaric, wounded by a saggita in the engagement, died. Attila died similarly, carried off by a nasal hemorrhage while he slept at night with his Hunnic concubine. It was suspected that this girl killed him. The very wise Priscus the Thracian wrote about this war. —Chronicon Paschale, p. 587.*

Jordanes reports the number of dead from this battle as 165,000, excluding the casualties of the Franco-Gepid skirmish previous to the main battle. Hydatius, a historian who lived at the time of Attila's invasion, reports the number of 300,000 dead. The garbled Chronicle of Fredegar states that in a prior battle on the Loire, 200,000 Goths and 150,000 Huns were slain. The figures offered are implausibly high, but the battle was noted as being exceptionally bloody by all of the primary sources. It is ultimately Jordanes' writing that leads to the difference in opinions in modern interpretations of the battle's outcome.

In the traditional account, modern scholars take a very direct interpretation of Jordanes, although usually with various points of contention. Modern scholars tend to agree that the battle took place on a long ridge, not a plain with a hill to one side. Hughes argues that the Huns deployed in the center, with their vassals on the wings, because they were expecting a Roman infantry center, with cavalry wings. This way Attila could pin down the center with the disorganized Hunnic style of warfare, while the majority of his troops focused on breaking one or both of the enemy flanks. However, Hughes argues that the Romans were expecting this, which is why he placed the Alans in the center of the formation, who were skilled cavalrymen and had advanced knowledge of how to fight alongside the Roman style of warfare. Bachrach also notes that Jordanes' point of placing the Alans in the center due to disloyalty is biased on Jordanes' part.

Jordanes' description of the battle, according to Hughes, takes place from the Roman perspective. Attila's forces arrived on the ridge first, on the far right side, before the Visigoths could take that position. Then Aetius' Romans arrived on the left side of the ridge, and repulsed the Gepids as they came up. Finally the Alans and the Visigoths under Thorismund fought their way up and secured the center of the ridge, holding it against Attila. However, Hughes differs from mainstream explanations in that he places Thorismund between the Alans and Visigothic main body, rather than on the Visigothic flank. MacDowall, for example, places Thorismund on the far right of the battlefield. The final phase of the battle is characterized by the Gothic attempt to take the right side of the ridge, in which Theodoric is slain, with the rest of his army unaware of his death. It is at this point that Thorismund located Attila's position in the Hunnic battle line, and attacked the Hunnic center, nearly slaying Attila himself and forcing the Hunnic center to retreat. Both armies fell into confusion as darkness descended, and neither side knew the outcome of the battle until the following morning.

After the battle, the allies decided what to do next, and resolved to place Attila under siege for a few days while they discussed the matter. Aetius allegedly persuaded both Thorismund and the Goths, and the Franks as well, to leave the battle and return home. Hughes argues that since the Franks were fighting a civil war in the battle, and Thorismund had five brothers who could usurp his new-found position as king, that it is likely Aetius did advise them to do so. O'Flynn argues that Aetius persuaded the Visigoths to return home in order to eliminate a group of volatile allies, and argues that he let Attila escape because he would have been just as happy to make an alliance with the Huns as with the Visigoths. The majority of historians also share the view that at this point Attila's "aura of invincibility" was broken, and that Aetius allowed the Huns to retreat in the hopes he could return to a status of partnership with them and draw on the Huns for future military support.

It has been suggested by Hyun Jin Kim that the entire battle is a play on the Battle of Marathon, with the Romans being the Plateans on the left, the Alans the weak Athenian center, and the Goths the Athenian regulars on the right, with Theodoric as Miltiades and Thorismund as Callimachus. He sees the return home by the Goths to secure Thorismund's throne as the same as the return to Athens to protect it from sedition and the Persian Navy. Kim's suggestion of Jordanes borrowing Herodotus has been noted by prior scholarship: Franz Altheim drew a parallel between the Catalaunian Fields and Salamis, and thought that the battle narrative was completely fabricated. John Wallace-Hadrill drew a parallel between Aetius and Themistocles regarding the alleged subterfuge after the battle in some primary source accounts. Other historians have noted its possible political statements on Jordanes' contemporary time, particularly regarding the Battle of Vouille and the Gothic Wars towards the end of Justinian's reign.

Ultimately this has led mainstream scholarship to agree that Jordanes' description of the Battle of the Catalaunian fields is distorted, even if they do not agree with a pro-Hunnish interpretation of the outcome. However, Kim's views have received a mixed reception among scholars of the period, with one reviewer noting that much of the text amounts to "a confused and confusing story, involving the rewriting of histories, genealogies and chronologies... exacerbated by strange and clumsy conflations." His view that Attila won the battle therefore should be taken with skepticism.

Other authors have previously considered the battle to have been indecisive. This latter view is rather widely accepted, although the outcome remains in disagreement as a whole. The most recent and comprehensive argument for an indecisive outcome belongs to that of Schultheis, who argues that Jordanes' work is more complicated than assumed due to the rearranging of a narrative first penned by a Goth named Ablabius in 471 and expanded by Cassiodorus, which he then himself abridged again and which in turn was used by Jordanes. Schultheis argues that provided that the entire conflict was not a literary topos based on the Battle of Marathon, the Alans were placed in the center of the battle line due to their effectiveness against the Huns as prescribed by the Strategikon of Pseudo-Maurice, and that Jordanes' text indicates the Hunnic center retreated before Thorismund charged. The Romans and Alans attacked down the ridge and across the plain to Attila's camp, while the Amali and other Gothic groups chased the collapsing Gothic right back to their camp, resulting in the mass confusion that followed. He concludes that losses during the retreats were heavy and led to an indecisive outcome, which an analysis of the chronology of primary source accounts shows over time was embellished into a Gothic victory.

The immediate and long-term effects of the Battle of the Catalaunian Fields are somewhat disputed. Attila returned to invade the Western Roman Empire in 452, which was more successful than his invasion of Gaul. After a 3-month siege of Aquileia, arranged by Aetius in the hopes it would use up his whole campaigning season, Attila razed the city and ravaged the Po Valley. Aetius, without aid from the federates in Gaul and without the military capacity to stop Attila on his own, sent an embassy consisting of Pope Leo I, Trygetius, and Gennadius Avienus to broker a treaty with Attila. Attila ultimately retreated from Italy, most likely due to a local famine and disease within his army. Some authors have argued that this sequence of military fiascos for Aetius ultimately led to his downfall. Merrils and Miles also argue it led to the downfall of Valentinian III as a result of Aetius' assassination. This has been disputed recently by Meghan McEvoy, who argues that Valentinian III wanted to be an active emperor and simply needed to remove his manager, and that there was no real direct cause for Aetius' murder.

In Gaul, the effects were somewhat more significant. Hughes argues that their assistance at the Catalaunian Plains led the Goths to destroy the Alans and besiege Orléans, believing that they had not been adequately rewarded for their service. In turn, this led to further concessions to the Goths from Aetius after Thorismund's assassination by his brother, who was amicable to the Romans. He thinks this may have been the point at which the Goths gained the same status of an independent kingdom that Gaiseric had. On the other hand, Kim argues that the battle led to the decline of Roman influence in northern Gaul, and strengthened the position of the Salian Franks and the Burgundians. He argues that it ultimately led to the victory of Childeric and the Franks over the Goths, the Roman comes Paul who had replaced Aegidius, and Odoacer, who returned to the Danube. This set the Franks up for dominance in Gaul and put Odoacer back in power as king of the Sciri. This would ultimately lead to his service during the final years of the Western Roman Empire and his establishment of a Kingdom of Italy.

Tackholm makes a distinct note of the increasing prominence of the battle in Gothic history. He shows that contemporary sources state the battle was inconclusive and give credit to Aetius, while later sources cast the battle as a Gothic victory and a major point of Gothic pride. This is also noted by Barnish, who claims that Cassiodorus and Jordanes works intended to portray Clovis, who had been at war with the Ostrogoths, as a new Attila and Theodoric the Great as a new Aetius. However, in the Roman sources, like those of Procopius and Victor Tunnensis, Aetius remains the central figure of pride and importance.

The most important effect of the battle is usually considered to be its impact on long-term Hunnic hegemony in Europe, of which there are differing opinions.

The Battle of the Catalaunian Plains is given its first modern historical perspective by Edward Gibbon, who called it the last victory achieved in the name of the Western Roman Empire. The first individual historical survey of the battle was given by Edward Shepherd Creasy, who heralded it as a triumph of Christian Europe over the pagan savages of Asia, saving classical heritage and European culture.

> *Attila's attacks on the Western empire were soon renewed, but never with such peril to the civilized world as had menaced it before his defeat at Châlons; and on his death, two years after that battle, the vast empire which his genius had founded was soon dissevered by the successful revolts of the subject nations. The name of the Huns ceased for some centuries to inspire terror in Western Europe, and their ascendancy passed away with the life of the great king by whom it had been so fearfully augmented.*

John Julius Norwich, a historian known for his works on Venice and on Byzantium, somewhat reiterates Creasy, saying of the battle of Châlons:

> *It should never be forgotten that in the summer of 451 and again in 452, the whole fate of western civilization hung in the balance. Had the Hunnish army not been halted in these two successive campaigns, had its leader toppled Valentinian from his throne and set up his own capital at Ravenna or Rome, there is little doubt that both Gaul and Italy would have been reduced to spiritual and cultural deserts.*

Modern authors have mostly moved away from this viewpoint though, some categorizing it as a battle that broke the myth of Hunnish invincibility. Parker called it a triumph of Roman defensive strategy. Arther Ferrill notes[citation needed] that, aside from the Battle of Qarqar (Karkar), this was the first significant conflict that involved large alliances on both sides. No single nation dominated either side; rather, two alliances met and fought in surprising coordination for the time. Meghan McEvoy, also, indicates that Aetius' successful construction and utilization of the federates in Gaul was a testament to his diplomatic and administrative skills, as well as to the influence of his military success. Ferrill writes:

> *After he secured the Rhine, Attila moved into central Gaul and put Orléans under siege. Had he gained his objective, he would have been in a strong position to subdue the Visigoths in Aquitaine, but Aetius had put together a formidable coalition against the Hun. Working frenetically, the Roman leader had built a powerful alliance of Visigoths, Alans and Burgundians, uniting them with their traditional enemy, the Romans, for the defense of Gaul. Even though all parties to the protection of the Western Roman Empire had a common hatred of the Huns, it was still a remarkable achievement on Aetius' part to have drawn them into an effective military relationship.*

Hyun Jin Kim thinks that the battle had a major impact on the future of Roman Gaul. He doesn't believe that it was a religious and cultural victory over the Huns of Central Asia. Kim argues that the battle significantly weakened the military capacity of the Alans, Visigoths, and the Romans, which allowed for Frankish and Burgundian hegemony in North Gaul. He also believes that it set up the career of Odoacer, who was later to found his own Kingdom in Italy after deposing the last Western Roman Emperor and submitting to Constantinople.

However, J.B. Bury expresses a quite different judgement:

> *The battle of Maurica was a battle of nations, but its significance has been enormously exaggerated in conventional history. It cannot in any reasonable sense be designated as one of the critical battles of the world. The Gallic campaign had really been decided by the strategic success of the allies in cutting off Attila from Orleans. The battle was fought when he was in full retreat, and its value lay in damaging his prestige as an invincible conqueror, in weakening his forces, and in hindering him from extending the range of his ravages.*

This assessment is also corroborated by Hughes, Bachrach, and Kim, all of whom argue that the real turning point of the invasion of Gaul was the successful defense of Orléans. They consider that the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains occurred as Attila was already retreating from Gaul. Bury also considers that as a whole, the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains would not have seriously altered history had it been a Hunnish victory:

> *If Attila had been victorious, if he had defeated the Romans and the Goths at Orleans, if he had held Gaul at his mercy and had translated – and we have no evidence that this was his design – the seat of his government and the abode of his people from the Theiss to the Seine or the Loire, there is no reason to suppose that the course of history would have been seriously altered. For the rule of the Huns in Gaul could only have been a matter of a year or two; it could not have survived here, any more than it survived in Hungary, the death of the great king, on whose brains and personal character it depended. Without depreciating the achievement of Aetius and Theoderic we must recognise that at worst the danger they averted was of a totally different order from the issues which were at stake on the fields of Plataea and the Metaurus. If Attila had succeeded in his campaign, he would probably have been able to compel the surrender of Honoria, and if a son had been born of their marriage and proclaimed Augustus in Gaul, the Hun might have been able to exercise considerable influence on the fortunes of that country; but that influence would probably not have been anti-Roman.*

Despite his views on the battle, it is noteworthy that Bury, who does not believe the Battle of Chalôns to be of macrohistorical importance, characterizes Aetius' rule thus: "From the end of the regency to his own death, Aetius was master of the Empire in the west, and it must be imputed to his policy and arms that Imperial rule did not break down in all the provinces by the middle of the fifth century." Bury thinks it clear that there was no one capable of taking Aetius' place. But he also considers that the Battle of Nedao was far more consequential to European history than the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains, a view also shared by many modern authors. Kim argues that the Huns were instrumental in triggering the evolution of medieval Europe during the early migration era by the introduction of East Asian, Central Asian, and Iranian cultural and societal practices, which agrees with Bury that the outcome of the battle would not have turned Europe into a cultural desert.

In the end, Attila returned in 452 to again press his claim of marriage to Honoria; Aetius was unable to block Attila's advance through the Julian Alps. Instead, he chose to garrison Aquileia against Attila's onslaught. Attila invaded and ravaged Italy, sacking numerous cities and razing Aquileia completely, allegedly leaving no trace of it behind. Valentinian III fled from the court at Ravenna to Rome; Aetius remained in the field but lacked the strength to offer battle, instead positioning his army at Bononia to block the roads through the Apennines to Ravenna and Rome. Edward Gibbon however says Aetius never showed his greatness more clearly in managing to harass and slow Attila's advance with only a shadow force. Attila finally halted at the Po, where he met an embassy including the prefect Trygetius, the ex-consul Gennadius Avienus, and Pope Leo I. After the meeting he turned his army back, having gained neither Honoria's hand nor the territories he desired. Ancient and medieval historians tended to give Pope Leo and supernatural forces credit for halting Attila, but a number of practical factors may have also induced Attila to retreat: his army was unable to obtain sufficient food and was suffering from disease, Aetius' army was busy harassing the Huns, and finally Marcian had sent forces north of the Danube to attack the homelands of the Huns and their vassals under a separate Aetius.

ASSASSINATION

Although in 453 Aetius had been able to betroth his son Gaudentius to Valentinian's daughter Placidia, Valentinian felt intimidated by Aetius, who some 30 years prior had supported Joannes against him and who, Valentinian believed, wanted to place his son on the throne. The Roman senator Petronius Maximus and the chamberlain Heraclius were therefore able to enlist Valentinian in a plot to assassinate Aetius. The ancient historian Priscus of Panium reports that on 21 September 454, while Aetius was at court in Ravenna delivering a financial account, Valentinian suddenly leaped from his seat and declared that he would no longer be the victim of Aetius's drunken depravities. He held Aetius responsible for the empire's troubles and accused him of trying to steal the empire from him.

When Aetius attempted to defend himself from the charges, Valentinian drew his sword and together with Heraclius, struck Aetius on the head, killing him instantly. Later, when Valentinian boasted that he had done well in disposing of Aetius, someone at court responded, "Whether well or not, I do not know. But know that you have cut off your right hand with your left." Edward Gibbon credits Sidonius Apollinaris with this famous observation.

Maximus expected to be made patrician in place of Aetius, but was blocked by Heraclius. Seeking revenge, Maximus arranged with two Huns who were friends of Aetius, Optila and Thraustila, to assassinate both Valentinian III and Heraclius. On 16 March 455, Optila stabbed the emperor in the temple as he dismounted in the Campus Martius and prepared for a session of archery practice. As the stunned emperor turned to see who had struck him, Optila finished him off with another thrust of his blade. Meanwhile, Thraustila stepped forward and killed Heraclius. Most of the soldiers standing close by had been faithful followers of Aetius, and none lifted a hand to save the emperor.

LEGACY

Aetius is generally viewed as a great military commander – indeed, he was held in such high esteem by the Eastern Roman Empire that he became known as the last true Roman of the west. Traditionally, historians also consider the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains as decisively important, crippling Attila by destroying his aura of invincibility. Gibbon states this view:

> *[Attila's] retreat across the Rhine confessed the last victory which was achieved in the name of the Western Roman Empire.*

Aetius effectively ruled the western empire from 433 to 454, and attempted to stabilize its European borders under a deluge of barbarians, foremost of which were Attila and the Huns. One of his greatest achievements was the assembling of the coalition against Attila. Regarding this, historian Arther Ferrill states:

> *After he secured the Rhine, Attila moved into central Gaul and put Orléans under siege. Had he gained his objective, he would have been in a strong position to subdue the Visigoths in Aquitaine, but Aetius had put together a formidable coalition against the Hun. The Roman leader had built a powerful alliance of Visigoths, Alans and Burgundians, uniting them with their traditional enemy, the Romans, for the defense of Gaul. Even though all parties to the protection of the Western Roman Empire had a common hatred of the Huns, it was still a remarkable achievement on Aetius' part to have drawn them into an effective military relationship.*

While J. B. Bury viewed Aetius as a great military commander and a prominent historical figure, he did not consider the battle itself to be particularly decisive. He argues that Aetius attacked the Huns when they were already retreating from Orléans (so the danger to Gaul was departing anyway); and he declined to renew the attack on the Huns next day, precisely in order to preserve the balance of power. (Others suggest that the Huns may have abandoned the siege of Orléans *because* Aetius's armies were advancing on them.) Bury suggests that the Germanic victory over the Huns at the Battle of Nedao, three years later, was more important. This determined that there would be no long-term Hun empire in Europe, which Bury thinks would have been unlikely even if they had crushed the Germanic tribes on that occasion. For Bury, the result of the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains determined chiefly that Attila spent his last year looting Italy, rather than Gaul.

Modern authors typically overlook the battle and focus on the greater impact of Aetius' career, and he is generally seen as one of the greatest Roman military commanders of all time, as well as an excellent diplomat and administrator. Meghan McEvoy states that the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains is more a testament to his political aptitude than his military skill due to his foresight in the ability to provision treaties and obligations. John Julius Norwich caustically referred to the assassination of Valentinian III by his own guards as an act that Valentinian brought on himself by his foolish execution of Aetius, the "Empire's greatest commander." Hugh Elton notes that Aetius and his army were one of the most effective Roman armies to have existed, with its speed and mobility pointing to a highly efficient logistical and manpower resupply system not directly evidenced by the sources. It is generally seen that the rapid fragmentation and collapse of the West after his death was a testament to his ability to hold the empire together.

Aetius' legacy has been filled with controversy somewhat similar to that of Stilicho as both left the Empire significantly weaker when they died. Like Stilicho's critics pointing towards his inability or unwillingness to deal with usurpation in Britain, Gaul and Spain, and the Rhine crossing of 406, critics of Aetius point towards the civil wars of 427–433 that allowed for the Vandal crossing to Africa and its eventual loss, and Aetius' inability to retake Carthage. Hughes attempts to address this, pointing out that Felix was responsible for the war that allowed for the Vandal crossing, and that the Romans did attempt to deal with it on several occasions, including Bonifacius in 429–432, Aspar in 430–435, and Aetius in 441. Heather states that the rise of Attila ultimately led to the loss of Africa as the Eastern Roman army and navy, which was bearing the brunt of the cost for the expedition, had to be recalled to the Balkans. Halsall argues that the black mark on Aetius' career was his mixed success in Spain, where the majority of the province was lost by 449, although he later rectified this. Hughes states that:

> *Stilicho and Aetius, who certainly knew each other, although they were from different generations, were responding to the specific, and vastly different, problems with which they were faced. Neither could find all of the answers.*